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THOUGHTS

ON THE

COLONIZATION OF FREE BLACKS.

WHAT shall we do with the free people of color? What can we do for their happiness consistently with our own? Are questions often asked by the thinking mind. The desire to make them happy has often been felt, but the difficulty of devising and accomplishing an efficient plan has hitherto appeared too great for humanity itself to accomplish. The mind shrunk back from the attempt. The time was not arrived. The servitude of the sons of Ham, *described* by Noah, in the spirit of prophecy, concerning the future condition of his posterity, was not terminated. At present as if by a divine impulse, men of virtue, piety, and reflection are turning their thoughts to this subject, and seem to see the wished for plan unfolding, *in the gradual separation of the black from the white population, by providing for the former, some suitable situation where they may enjoy the advantages to which they are entitled by nature and their creator's will.* This is a great subject, and there are several weighty questions connected with it, which deserve a deep consideration.

Is it a practicable thing to form a colony of free blacks in our own wild lands, or on the coast of Africa?

Is it probable that the establishment would be productive of general happiness?

What is the most desirable situation for such a settlement? In what manner, and by whom might such a colony be planted with the greatest hope of success?

Much wisdom would no doubt be required in arranging a plan of so much magnitude, and some perseverance in executing it and carrying it to perfection. But it cannot be supposed to be among the things which are impracticable, to plant a colony, either of blacks or whites, either in Africa, or in some remote district of our own country. Most nations have had their colonies. Greece and Rome planted many which grew and flourished, and which, as they grew, added strength and lustre to the mother country. At the present time there are few nations who have not their foreign settlements, and some of them from year to year are increasing the numbers of their colonies. With what ease is G. Britain transplanting a part of her population, in the remotest regions of the earth, and peopling New Holland, a land destined like our own to extend the empire of liberty and Christian blessings to surrounding nations.* It

* It is a remarkable instance of the mysterious and inscrutable ways of Providence, that the colony of New Holland which is principally composed of British con-

does not appear that it would require much greater skill or labor to form a separate establishment for free blacks in our own distant territories, than it is to form a new state. The people of color observing the constant emigration of the whites, would soon feel the common impulse, if they could see a place where they might remove, and which they could fondly call their own. Many have both the means and disposition to go to any reasonable distance, or even to a great distance where they could assume the rank of men, and act their part upon the great theatre of life. Their local attachments are no stronger than those of other men, their ambition no less than that of any other color.

To colonize them in Africa would be a much more arduous undertaking. The country must be explored and some situation chosen, fertile and healthy—expense must be incurred in fair and honorable purchase from the natives—an honorable appeal *perhaps* be made to the nations of Europe, as to the justice and humanity of our views. An efficient government must for a time at least be afforded to the colony—the free blacks must be instructed that it would be to their interest to remove to the land which gave them origin, and instruction provided to raise their minds to that degree of knowledge, which in time would fit them for self-government. “These difficulties are real and some of them might be found to be very great, but they are not insurmountable. We have wisdom in our councils, and energy in our government. In such an undertaking we should have reason and the God of eternal justice on our side. Humanity has many a virtuous son who would willingly and carefully explore the long line of African coast which has not fallen under the dominion of any European nation. Their devotedness to their country’s interest and glory would make them faithful to their undertaking, and their desire for the happiness of the free people of color, would induce them if possible to find a country where health and plenty might be enjoyed. The consent of the chiefs to part with a sufficient portion of soil, might be easily obtained, especially when they were informed that the sole design of the colony, was to restore their own children and bring them back free and happy. From what has often taken place on the coast of Africa, we may be assured that the cost of procuring the right of soil, by fair and just purchase, would not be great. The expense of conveying the first settlers, of maintaining a sufficient force to protect the colony, and of supplying the wants of the colonists for a short period might be more considerable. Yet the wisdom of congress might devise some means of lightening, perhaps of re-paying, the cost. Many of the free people of

victs has become flourishing; its inhabitants peaceable, orderly and industrious, and through the instrumentality of missionaries, Christianity is flourishing among them; and through them likely to extend civilization, and the benefits of the Christian religion, to the ignorant and superstitious natives of that country and the adjacent islands.

color have property sufficient to transport, and afterward to establish themselves. The ships of war might be employed occasionally in this service, while many would indent themselves to procure a passage to the land of their independence. The crews of the national ships which might be from time to time at the colony would furnish at least a part of that protection which would be necessary for the settlers; and in a little time the trade which the colony would open with the interior, would more than compensate for every expense, if the colony were wisely formed. "From the single river of Sierra Leone, where there is a colony of free people of color, the imports in Great Britain were nearly, and the exports to the same river fully, equal to the imports and exports, exclusive of the slave trade of the whole extent of the western coast of Africa, prior to the abolition of that traffic."* To allay the jealousies of other nations, which might arise from our establishing a settlement in Africa, a successful appeal might be made to their justice and humanity. It would be only doing as they have done should no such appeal be made. Spain has her settlements in Africa. France on the rivers Gambia and Senegal, Great Britain, at Sierra Leone and the Cape; Portugal, in Congo and Loango. On the principles of justice no nation would have a right to interfere with our intentions. Moreover, in this period of the world when the voice of justice and humanity begins to be listened to with attention, is there not reason to hope, that plans, the sole design of which is the benefit of the human race, would be approved in the cabinet of princes and hailed by the benevolent of all nations? The colony would not suffer for want of instructors, in morals, religion and the useful arts of life. The time at last is come when not a few are embibing the spirit of Him who came from Heaven "to seek and save the lost." That spirit is only beginning to go forth, which has already been so successful in teaching, the Caffre, the Hottentot, the Boshemen, the means of present happiness and the way of eternal life.† In the mean time the great efforts which are making to improve the mental condition of the people of color seems designed in providence to prepare them for some great and happy change in their situation.

It need not be apprehended, that these people would be unwilling to remove to the proposed establishment. To suppose this, is to suppose that they do not long after happiness; that they do not feel the common pride and feelings of men. In some of our great cities there are associations formed to open a correspondence with the colony at Sierra Leone and

* Ninth report of African Institution.

† A plan of a school was laid in New York, October, 1816, for the purpose of training young people of color, as teachers for those of their own color, in this country, and to have a supply of instructors ready for the proposed colony, should it be ever formed.

prepare their minds for a removal to a colony should it be ever formed.† The colony at Sierra Leone on the western coast of Africa, seems as if designed by God to obviate every difficulty, to silence objections, and point out the way in which every obstacle may be removed, if measures sufficiently wise are adopted in establishing a similar colony from this country. The colony alluded to was first established in the year 1791. Its first settlers were a few people of color who were in Great Britain, and from 1100 to 1200 of the same description in Nova Scotia. In the year 1811, the population had increased to 2000 exclusive of many natives, notwithstanding the sickness and mortality incident to a new settlement, and the settlement being once destroyed by the French. In the year 1816, the population had increased to 3000.¶ All this has been accomplished or at least it was originated, and for many years maintained by a company of benvolent and enterprising men, by men too who are far removed from those places where free blacks are to be found. What then might be done under the blessing of that Being who wills the happiness of all his creatures. by the American government, aided by the benevolence of all its citizens, and surrounded with thousands who would be willing to emigrate, and many of whom could carry with them property, the useful arts of life, and above all, the knowledge of the benign religion of Christ.

Is it probable that the general good would be promoted by the establishment of such a colony? If there is not reason to believe that it would be for the general benefit, the idea ought to be given up and the scheme rejected. But is there not reason to believe that the interest of the whites and the free people of color would be equally promoted, by the latter being colonized in some suitable situation? It can scarcely be doubted that slavery has an injurious effect on the morals and habits of a country where it exists. It insensibly induces a habit of indolence. Idleness seldom fails to be attended with dissipation. Should the time ever come when slavery shall not exist in these states; yet if the people of color remain among us, the effect of their presence will be unfavorable to

† Such an association exists in Philadelphia.

¶ "Early in the winter of 1816, about thirty people of color left Boston with a view of settling themselves in the British colony at Sierra Leone, in Africa. The vessel in which they sailed was the property and under the command of the celebrated Paul Cuffee. Captain Cuffee has returned to this country, and brings letters from the emigrants to their friends and benefactors. We have seen one of the letters dated April 3, 1816. It states that they all arrived safe at Sierra Leone, after a passage of 55 days, and were welcomed by all in the colony. The place is represented as "good." They have fruits of all kinds and at all seasons of the year. The governor gave each family a lot of land in the town, and fifty acres of "good land" in the country, or more in proportion to their families. Their land in the country is about two miles from town. They have plenty of rice and corn, and all other food that is good. There were five churches in the colony, and three or four schools. in one of which there were 150 female Africans, who are taught to read the word of God" The Boston Recorder,

our industry and morals. The recollection of their former servitude will keep alive the feeling that they were formed for labor, and that the descendants of their former masters, ought to be exempt at least from the more humble and toilsome pursuits of life. The gradual withdrawing of the blacks would insensibly, and from an easy necessity induce habits of industry, and along with it a love of order and religion. Could they be removed to some situation where they might live alone, society would be saved many a pang which now is felt, and must in course of time be much more sensibly felt from the intermixture of the different colors, and at the same time be relieved from a heavy burden, in supporting that large portion of this people which falls into poverty and must be maintained by others. If the benefit of the proposed separation would be considerable to those states where the people of color are comparatively few, how great would it be to those where they are very numerous. The love of liberty which prevails in those states, must be attended with a desire to see abolished a system so contrary to the best feelings of our natures. But however strong the desires of many, however lively the impressions of the great principles of right, or however pungent the convictions of a dying bed, it is believed to be unsafe to encourage the idea of emancipation. The evil therefore increases every year, and the gloomy picture grows darker continually, so that the question is often and anxiously asked—*What will be the end of all this?* The most natural and easy answer seems to be—Let no time be lost—let a colony or colonies be formed on the coast of Africa, and let laws be passed permitting the emancipation of slaves on condition that they shall be colonized. By this means the evil of slavery will be diminished, and in a way so gradual as to prepare the whites for the happy and progressive change.

The benefits of the proposed plan to the race of blacks appear to be numerous and great. That they are capable of improvement is not to be contradicted, and that their improvement progresses daily, notwithstanding every obstacle, is not to be denied. Their capacity for self government whether denied or not, is ever present to our view in the island of St. Domingo. But it is in vain that we believe them capable of improvement, or that we are convinced that they are equal to the task of governing themselves, unless this unhappy people are separated from their former masters. The friends of man will strive in vain to raise them to a proper level while they remain among us. They will be kept down, on the one side by prejudice, too deep rooted to be eradicated, on the other, by the recollection of former inferiority, and despair of ever assuming an equal standing in society. Remove them. Place them by themselves in some climate, congenial with their color and constitutions, and in some fruitful soil; their contracted minds will then expand and their natures rise. The hope of

place and power will soon create the feeling that they are men: Give them the hope of becoming possessed of power and influence, and the pleasure of their invigorated minds will be similar to ours in like circumstances. At present they have few incentives to industry and virtue, compared with those which they would feel, in a land which they could call their own, and where there was no competition except with their own color.

This great enterprise, must be undertaken; either by a union of virtuous and pious individuals, as in the case of the colony of Sierra Leone already mentioned in its original state; or by the government of the United States. Perhaps on mature deliberation, it might appear a work worthy of the government, and one that could be accomplished with the greatest ease and in the most efficient manner under the patronage of the nation. None but the nation's arm could reach to all the situations in which the free blacks are placed through our extended country, nor any but its councils be wise enough to accommodate the various interests which ought to be consulted in so great an undertaking. If wrong has been done to Africa in forcing away her weeping children, the wrong can be best redressed, by that power which did the injury. If Heaven has been offended, by putting chains on those, whom by its eternal laws it has willed to be free, the same hand which provoked the divine displeasure, should offer the atoning sacrifice. Under a former government this guilt and evil were brought principally upon our land; but for many years the state governments, under the eye of the general government, continued this great violation of the laws of nature. Let then the representatives of this great and free people, not only feel it to be their interest, but their duty and glory to repair the injuries done to humanity by our ancestors by restoring to independence those who were forced from their native land, and are now found among us.

It remains yet to answer the question: Should congress in their wisdom adopt the proposed measure; would it best answer the end designed, to plant the colony in some distant section of our country, or in the land to which their color and original constitution are adapted? If fixed in the territories of the United States, the expense of procuring soil might be saved, and the difficulty of removing settlers to the appointed place would be diminished, especially if the colony were planted at no very great distance in the interior. But these advantages would be in part counterbalanced, by having in our vicinity an independent settlement of people who were once our slaves. There might be cause of dread lest they should occasionally combine with our Indian neighbors, or with those European nations who have settlements adjacent to our own, and we should have them for our enemies. However great the dis-

tance at which such a settlement would be made in our own country, it would furnish great facility to the slaves in the nearest states, to desert their masters' service, and escape to a land where their own race was sovereign and independent. An easy communication would also be open to send information to those who remain in slavery, so as to make them uneasy in their servitude. If removed to Africa, these last difficulties would disappear, or be greatly diminished. There we should have nothing to fear from their becoming our enemies. Removed far from our sight; our contempt of them, produced by their situation, and by long habit confirmed, would gradually die away, and their jealousy and suspicion proportionably decrease. The colony could never become an asylum for fugitive slaves, and but little opportunity could be afforded to communicate with this country in such a manner as to render the slaves uneasy in their masters' service. On the other hand, great and happy results might be produced by their being colonized in Africa. It is the country of their fathers, a climate suited to their color, and one to which their constitution, but partially altered by their abode in this country, would soon adapt itself. Who can tell the blessings which might in this way be conferred on Africa herself, when her strangers should be restored, and she should receive her children redeemed from bondage by the humanity of America, and by the hand of virtue and religion restored from their captivity. With what delight would she view them, improved in arts, in civilization and in knowledge of the true God. She would forget her sorrows, her wounds would be healed, and she would bless the hands of her benefactors. Do we not owe to that hapless country a debt contracted by our fathers; and how can we so well re-pay it, as by transporting to her shores a multitude of its own descendants, who have learned the arts of life and are softened by the power of true religion, and who can therefore be instrumental in taming and placing in fixed abodes, the wild and wandering people who now roam over that great section of the globe. A nation of Christians ought to believe that all the earth is destined to enjoy happiness under the dominion of *the Prince of peace*. Africa is not forgotten by Him who "feeds the sparrows." The spirit of her people shall arise. Her sons shall assume their proper dignity, and she shall yet rejoice in her creator's favor. Heaven executes its purposes by human agents, and perhaps this may be one of those means which are laid up in store to bless the sable millions that now exist, the pity of angels, but the scorn of thoughtless man. Could any thing be deemed so effectual for the happiness of that portion of the world as the plan proposed? In this way there might soon be fixed a seat of liberal learning in Africa, from which the rays of knowledge might dart across those benighted regions. Is it too much to be-

lieve it possible that *He* who brings light out of darkness, and good out of evil, has suffered so great an evil to exist as African slavery, that in a land of civil liberty and religious knowledge, thousands and tens of thousands might at the appointed time be prepared to return, and be the great instrument of spreading peace and happiness. Let not these reflections be thought wholly visionary. We know that the ways of the great ruler of the world and director of events are wonderful and great beyond calculation. We know that great and increasing benefits arise to the natives of Africa from the colony at Sierra Leone. From the vicinity of that colony, the son of an African chief, who has seen and felt its benefits, thus writes in the summer of 1815 : “ What a happy thing it is to see the peaceable state that this country is now in ! quiet and free from slave vessels !—no dragging of families from one another !—no innumerable slaves chained together, male and female ! and the enemies of humanity, the slave traders, gradually quitting the country ! It has struck me forcibly, that where the gospel makes its appearance, there satan’s kingdom gradually diminishes. May God give grace and perseverance to his servants to carry on his work ; and make them instruments in his hands of bringing them to perfection. On the fourth of June, 1815, ninety children and one adult were baptized into the faith of Christ in the colony. On which occasion the same young prince thus writes : “ I never was better pleased in my lifetime than to see so many of my countrymen brought so far as to be baptized, and particularly when I saw a grown up native come forward to be baptized. We had likewise the happiness of seeing our church so full, that some were obliged to stand out of doors. Five or six of the native chiefs were present on the occasion. I had more hopes that day than I ever had of those poor perishing countrymen of mine.”* The period in which we live is big with great events, and as happy as they are great. It is pregnant with greater still. We have lived to see the day when man has begun to learn the lesson of freedom and happiness. America is blessed with every blessing civil and religious. Europe begins slowly but sensibly to reform her governments. The gloomy and dread superstitions of Asia, begin to totter before the gospel of Christ. Nor shall Africa be forgotten. Her bosom begins to warm with hope, and her heart to beat with expectation and desire. Toward this land of liberty she turns her eyes, and to the representatives of this great and free people, she stretches forth her hands, panting for the return of her absent sons and daughters. Happy America if she shall endeavor not only to rival other nations, in arts and arms, but to equal and exceed them in the great cause of humanity, which has begun its never ending course.

* Appendix to Christian Observer, for 1815.